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Herpetological postage stamps issued from the Philippines

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Abstract

In this essay, we commemorate the zoological and herpetological contributions of Angel Chua Alcala, with a review of stamps and pictorial cancellations on herpetological themes from the Philippines. Between 1982 and 2017, a total of 79 such stamps, stamp sheetlets and undenominated tabs, depicting amphibians and reptiles have been officially issued by the postal administration of the country, all but one within its commemorative stamp releases. Species featured are those of ecotourism importance, in addition to threatened or endemic taxa, although stylized as well as non-local species too have featured on stamps produced by the country.

Keywords: Philippines, philately, stamps, postmarks, amphibians, reptiles

Introduction

The archipelagic nation of the Philippines has, over the years, issued more than its fair share of stamps on herpetological themes. Understandably, a majority of these depict marine turtles, much associated both with the country's culture and heritage and linked to ecotourism and its beaches and marine life. Herpetological motifs that have appeared include snakes, linked to the annual celebration of the Chinese Lunar New Year (the snake taking the sixth spot once in twelve years).

This essay, honoring one of Philippines' distinguished environmental heroes, Dr. Angel Chua Alcala, presents an inventory of postage stamps issued by the Philippines Post. Herpetologists have acknowledged Dr Alcala's significant work on the country's herpetofauna by naming a genus of amphibian, *Alcalus*, in his honor (Brown et al., 2015).

Depiction of amphibians and reptiles on stamps of the world is widespread and has been discussed in the philatelic literature (e.g., Riemer, 1993; Das, 1994, 2014; Watermolen, 1995), and specialist catalogs exist on the topic, such as those of Eichler (2017) for amphibians and Bearse et al. (1977) and

Domfil (1992) for the herpetofauna as a whole. Published literature in herpetological philately includes regional inventories: Amr (2013) for the Middle East, and Das (2014) for Malaysia; and the use of the theme for raising conservation awareness, chiefly, marine turtles (Balazs et al., 1990; Gomez and Balazs 1983), drawing attention to other topics, such as cultural significance of herpetofaunas (Rings 2005), or understanding local perceptions of a nation's biodiversity through its philatelic releases (Nemésio et al., 2013).

All official issues from the Philippines, featuring amphibians and reptiles, were enumerated (Table 1). The cut-off date was 22 June 2020. We include here stamps that feature herpetological motifs, symbols or represent stylized species that sometimes are unrecognizable to species. Names of series follow Stanley Gibbons catalogues. Abbreviations of catalogue prefix, SG represent the Stanley Gibbons Catalog numbers (from the SG catalogues). Text figures are not reproduced to scale

Results

Philatelic issues from the Philippines started in the year 1854, during Spanish dominion under Queen Isabella II, and with "Filipinas" since 1872 from the reign of King Amadeus I, via the use of overprinted United States stamps in 1899, to the first stamps under its current name in 1946, upon the country's independence on 4 July. A postal history of the Philippines is in Encarnacion (1985). At the time of this review (22 June 2020), as many as 79 postage stamps (including stamp sheetlets and undenominated tabs) on a herpetological theme have been issued by the country (Table 1). Face values are indicated in Philippine Pesos (PHP), except for the first herpetological issue, a low-value of 40 centavos.

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